Time and detective novels: exploring the past and the night in Ian Rankin's John Rebus series

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Abstract

Given that time is an important theme within detective novels, this article explores the portrayal of time in Ian Rankin's John Rebus series. The analysis concentrates on two important temporal dimensions: the past and the night.

Introducing time

Time has a mysterious omnipresence; on the one hand, it is 'intangible, invisible, colourless, odourless, soundless' (West-Pavlov, 4) and on the other, it is situated everywhere and permeates everything (Adam, "Time"). Confusing yet intriguing, time is an issue that many academics and novelists have reflected on in their work. The Scottish crime novelist Ian Rankin is a noteworthy example as he regularly uses his detective novels featuring John Rebus to critically examine various aspects of time. This article, therefore, explores the portrayal of time within the Rebus series and detective novels more widely. It concentrates on two dimensions of time that run through many detective novels: the past and the night.

Before turning to Rankin and Rebus, it is useful to outline a brief conceptual framework through which we can view time in the detective novel. It has two dimensions to it, the first is a focus on temporality – in other words, the social production and social experience of time. Here, time is viewed

as something made and re-made, constructed and manipulated (Burnett et al.), and not 'an innate backdrop to social life' (Cloke *et al.*, 941). This perspective is useful because it guides us to the ways in which people/authors/characters experience and manage time, how they infuse time with meaning, how they favour certain times over others, and how time is struggled over and contested.

The second dimension is the relationality of time (Adam, "Timewatch"; Bennett and Burke). Thinking relationally encourages us to consider the relations of time, and there are two broad categories that will be focused on here: (a) the relationship between different forms of time and (b) relationships between time and place. In terms of the former, our gaze turns to the socially produced, co-constitutive and often blurry relationships between the day and night, the past/present/future, fast and slow, work and leisure, and so on. This allows us to consider what Barbara Adam ("Timewatch") terms the mutual implication of time. In terms of the latter, time has a complex relationship with place – place being space infused with meaning (Cresswell). Here, I draw primarily from scholarship within human geography that explores the co-production, entwinning and (often) inseparability of time and space/place (e.g. Andrews; Castree; Massey; May and Thrift). This view also resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope that speaks to the bringing together of time and place within a given narrative. While I do not draw directly on the chronotope in my analysis, it does usefully encourage us to see 'the ways in which space and time are *always* bound together, as well as to the *particular* forms in which such conjoined space-time is engendered, experienced and ordered' (Howell and Beckingham, 935). Using the bifocal lenses of relationality and temporality, therefore, provide a valuable way of making sense of literary time.

Rankin, Rebus and time

Duration and speed are important temporal aspects of the Rebus novels. Their duration – that is, 'how much the story decides to cover, where it draws its borders' (Silber, 111) – is short in relation to, say,

the possible life-course of the perpetrators or their imaginable journeys through the criminal justice system. Indeed, the duration of each novel tends to omit the court trials and punishments of the perpetrators, with visits to courts and prisons being infrequent over the course of the series. The duration, therefore, enables the detectives to take centre stage. While the duration is often concentrated, the speed of the novels varies; time moves slow and fast. To quote Silber once more, Rankin is conscious of 'where to linger [and] where to speed up' (25). Lingering can take the form of fine detail about specific moments as well as times where characters literally wait. While some crime dramas have been criticised for unrealistically reducing or omitting waiting times – such as the wait for forensic results in *CSI* (cf. Lam) – the Rebus novels portray waiting as something that the police must endure. Rebus and colleagues, for instance, are frequently waiting for forensic results and sitting in waiting rooms. They are not alone; secondary victims (such as friends and relatives of those murdered) are often portrayed as enduring painful and lengthy waits for justice. More abstractly, the city of Edinburgh is also presented as waiting, menacingly so. It is '[w]aiting to pounce' in *Fleshmarket Close* (391), 'waiting to show its dark, shrivelled heart' in *Set in Darkness* (25), and 'a crime scene waiting to happen' in *The Falls* (153). In addition, detective novels are structured in way that makes the reader wait for, and anticipate, the denouement (Martin).

Just as waiting is represented in the Rebus series as being harmful, it is also portrayed as being frustrating. It is held up relationally as inferior time – time that could be better spent doing something else. Detective work is regularly portrayed as being littered with time-wasting individuals and activities, often in a context of time scarcity where time is both limited and disappearing all-too-quickly. As the clock metaphorically ticks, tensions rise and patience wains. Patience, Rankin reminds us in *A Question of Blood*, is 'the one thing he [Rebus] had no time for' (8). Justice cannot wait, maintains Rebus, and the dead-ends and bureaucracy of police work frustrate him – as this extract from *Saints of the Shadow Bible* (69) demonstrates:

> [Rebus] realised the case was disappearing, as though it had been hoisted on to a trailer and was on its way for scrap. He looked around the office. Page was at some meeting, taking Clarke with him. Ronnie Ogilvie was prepping to give evidence at a trial. Christine Esson was studying statements. Was this what he had craved during his retirement? He had forgotten the lulls, the hours spent on paperwork, the hanging around. He thought of Charlie Watts – hadn't he said something about life as a Rolling Stone? Fifty years in the band, ten spent drumming and the other forty waiting for something to happen. Segue to Peggy Lee: 'Is That All There Is?'

Another important temporal aspect of detective work, according to Rankin, is its time-consuming nature. The cases in police procedurals are rarely – if ever – solved quickly or easily; they are long, puzzling and tiring. Unsurprisingly, the detectives – with some exceptions – are presented as being committed and driven, obsessed even. Annual leave is rarely taken, and shifts are long. 'When was the last time you only worked an eight-hour shift?' The detective Siobhan Clarke asks Rebus in *The Falls* who, 'raising a smile', replies: 'September, nineteen eighty-six' (184).

The breaking of boundaries, Gill Plain (29) argues, is an important theme in Rankin's work – '[p]ast and present, public and private, certainty and doubt' – and this is also the case with on-duty and off-duty time. Indeed, Rebus, Clarke and colleagues have a poor work-life balance; when off-duty, they continue to work late into the night, their thoughts turn to cases, and socialising with colleagues inevitably centres on 'shop talk'. When suspended from duty – as he so often is – Rebus continues to work on cases. He even works on cases after his retirement, first by taking a civilian role working on cold cases (in *Standing in Another Man's Grave*), then by coming back as a Detective Sergeant following an extension of the retirement age (in *Saints of the Shadow Bible*) and in the novels after as unpaid advisor to Clarke and fellow detective Malcolm Fox. While Fox comments in *Saints of the Shadow Bible* that it is '[t]oo easy sometimes to let the job smother us' (229), this smothering is appealing for Rebus; it helps him take his mind off his dysfunctional life outside of work. Yet, the time-

consuming nature of policing is shown to have harmful consequences as this passage in *The Naming of the Dead* (315) suggests:

> *I'm owed a private life, an evening off.*
>
> Otherwise, [Siobhan Clarke will…] become just like Rebus – obsessed and sidelined; thrawn and mistrusted. He'd been stuck at inspector rank for the best part of two decades. She wanted more. Wanted to do the job well, but be able to switch off now and again. Wanted a life outside her job, rather than a job that became her life. Rebus had lost family and friends, pushing them aside in favour of corpses and con men, killers, petty thieves, rapists, thugs, racketeers and racists. When he went out drinking, he did so on his own, standing quietly at the bar, facing the row of optics. He had no hobbies, didn't follow any sports, never took a holiday. If he had a week or two off, she could usually find him at the Oxford Bar, pretending to read the paper in a corner, or staring dully at the daytime telly.

The porosity of, and boundary erasure between, on-duty and off-duty is an 'occupational hazard' of detective work, according to Rankin and other police procedural novelists. Cases and police work bleed into off-duty and the resulting stains linger.

The past

The past is central to detective novels, and this is especially so within the Rebus series where the present is regularly positioned in relation to the past, much more so than the future. I argue that the Rebus novels invoke three important relations between the past and the present: (1) conflict between generations; (2) Rebus and Edinburgh 'living' in the past; and (3) the past harming the present. These will be examined in turn and, in so doing, I shall draw on the metaphor of the palimpsest. *Oxford*

Dictionaries (online) defines the palimpsest as a 'manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing'. Importantly, faint traces of past writing can linger or even reappear on a palimpsest. Scholars have used the palimpsest metaphor to visualise the relations between the past and the present within texts, people and landscapes: the 'violent erasure' (Marshall *et al.*) of the past and the haunting traces of the past in the present.

Conflict between generations

The past is brought into relation with the present through different generations within the Rebus series. Amid a scattering of intergenerational bonding – such as the friendship between Rebus and the younger Clarke – Rankin regularly returns to the issue of conflict between generations. The Rebus novels suggest that, like families and organised crime, the police are replete with intergenerational conflict.

Ageing is a recurring theme of the Rebus novels as Sara Martín Alegre suggests. As Rebus and his nemesis, the gangster Morris Gerald Cafferty, grow older, Rankin focuses more on generational power struggles within the police and organised crime. The older generations in both spheres are frequently othered – framed as being different, inferior, out-dated, unwilling and unable to change, and in need of removal. This speaks to a long-standing social practice of '[r]elegating people, practices and ways of life to bygone times' (Côté-Boucher, 162). As part of this othering, Rebus and Cafferty are regularly positioned as embodying 'the past' and they are often juxtaposed with younger generations and modernity. This is especially so during *Standing in Another Man's Grave* and as such this novel requires close examination here. Back working for Lothian and Borders Police on cold cases, Rebus is positioned as an outsider. His 'stale clothes and alcohol/tobacco dependencies', Rodney Marshall (236) notes, 'are in marked contrast to the designer suits, healthy lifestyle and media-friendly appearances of his two bosses, James Page and Daniel Cowan'. The 'new generation' view Rebus as having

anachronistic attitudes and methods as well as limited technological know-how. Even Rebus acknowledges that he feels out-of-sync with modern policing in a conversation with Clarke:

> '[…] The job's changed, Siobhan. Everything's...' He struggled to find the words. 'It's like with Christine Esson. Ninety per cent of the stuff she does is beyond me. The way she *thinks* is beyond me.'
>
> 'You're vinyl, we're digital?' Clarke offered.
>
> 'Contacts used to be the way you got things done. The only network that mattered was the one out there on the street.' […]
>
> 'Your way works too, John – Edderton; Susie Mercer. Those were shoe-leather results. So don't go thinking you're obsolete.' (Rankin, "Standing", 222-223)

Using an insult that one can imagine being fired at Rebus, the gangster, Darryl Christie, tells Cafferty that '[y]ou belong in the history books' (Rankin, "Standing", 279). Away from *Standing in Another Man's Grave*, symbolic use of goods past their sell-by date (milk in *Saints of the Shadow Bible* and Lemsip in *Exit Music*) add to this sense that Rebus and Cafferty are unpalatable and past their best. Rebus is referred to as a dinosaur on several occasions, further speaking to the idea that he does not belong in modern policing and modern society more generally. He is marked as an outsider, out-of-time and out-of-place. The dinosaur metaphor also plays with the belief that Rebus is unable to modernise.

In fact, there are several characters who wish to make Rebus and Cafferty extinct. Or in palimpsestic terminology, to violently erase them from their profession and the city of Edinburgh. Malcolm Fox, for example, initially equates Rebus with all that was bad with yesterday's policing. In his role in Internal Affairs, Fox is determined to remove Rebus from the force in *Standing in Another Man's Grave*. Speaking to Clarke, he states:

> I know a cop gone bad when I see one. Rebus has spent so many years crossing the line, he's managed to rub it out altogether. […] John Rebus should be extinct, Clarke. Somehow the Ice Age came and went and left him swimming around while the rest of us evolved. (Rankin, "Standing", 105-106)

Fox is not successful and surprisingly warms to Rebus in the novels that follow. Rebus is resilient and continues to linger – much like Cafferty who avoids being usurped and killed by Christie during his supposed 'retirement' from organised crime. More than this, come the end of *Rather Be the Devil* with Christie arrested and heading for prison, Cafferty makes it clear he is out of retirement and back 'running' Edinburgh. Cafferty and Rebus will not let go. As new generations of people, ideas, working styles and technologies emerge, Rankin repeatedly reminds us that new is not necessarily better (MacDonald, "Ian Rankin").

Rebus and Edinburgh living in the past

Rankin portrays Rebus – like Edinburgh – as 'living' in the past. This is evident, for example, in the following passage from *Black and Blue* (461):

> Jethro Tull: 'Living in the Past'. Rebus had been a slave to that rhythm for far too long. It was the work that did it. As a detective, he lived in people's pasts: crimes committed before he arrived on the scene; witnesses' memories ransacked. He had become a historian, and the role had bled into his personal life. Ghosts, bad dreams, echoes.

Unlike Cafferty, Rebus is fascinated with, and drawn to, Edinburgh's harmful past. Yet, it is a past that is often erased and hidden or, to use geographical metaphors deployed by Rankin, buried and swept under the carpet. The concealment of the past is often orchestrated by members of the city's elite and the police in the series. 'That was the Edinburgh way', Rankin informs us in *Let It Bleed*, 'to bury and forget' (161). Yet, Rebus goes against the grain here by living in the past:

> You became part of the whole story. This was what interested Rebus. The people interested him; their stories fascinated him. When part of their lives, he could forget his own. (Rankin, "Hanging", 92)

Rebus gravitates towards places that remind him of the past. He is often at crime scenes, mortuaries and burial sites, and these evoke in Rebus thoughts and memories of harmful pasts. Even in his flat, he is continually reminded of the past. Influenced by gothic fiction, Rankin presents us with a city and protagonist who are haunted by ghosts of the past. As MacDonald ("Ghosts", 67) suggests, Rebus is 'both literally and figuratively haunted by the ghosts of his own life, as well as by the victims of the various murders he investigates'. Ghosts remind Rebus of past harms and the need for him to secure justice quickly. Cook (144) draws out the palimpsestic quality of this:

> [A]s the city is haunted, so it is with the detective. [They are outcomes...] of an aggregation of events and traumas which have shaped their character. They are products of their history, overridden by new developments, the past superseded, even covered, but never erased. At any moment, this latent past is liable to rise up and insinuate itself into the present.

Amid a wider culture of burying and forgetting, Rebus is determined to excavate and remember. He is, as Cafferty puts it in *Set in Darkness*, 'always trying to dig up the corpses. One foot in the past and one in the grave' (235). Rebus sees himself as a detective, historian and archaeologist and views victims as

restless, lacking closure and in need of justice. While Rankin deliberately devises narratives that challenge the views of his less liberal protagonist and often infers that society is as much to blame as offenders, Rebus holds on to the idea that current or future punishment must fit the past crime. Yet Rebus's retributive motives merge with consequentialist ones. Here he sees justice as a means of securing a better future: it offers closure and rest to the victims as well as atonement for himself. His view becomes apparent with Christmas approaching in *Set in Darkness* (326-327):

> So much of the past simply disappeared. But it was their job to make sure past crimes did not go unpunished, whether they be committed the day before or two decades before. Not because justice or the lawmakers demanded it, but for all the silent victims, the haunted souls. And for their own satisfaction, too. Because in trapping the guilty, they atoned for their own sins of commission and omission. How in God's name could you switch that all off for the sake of swapping some presents...?

The past harming the present

The past is, Rankin reminds us, not so easily forgotten or buried; it is regularly uncovered and brought to the surface. The past has a buoyance of sorts. This is true of much crime fiction where, as Sandberg (153) notes, 'the past […] may be temporarily forgotten, it may have been swept with all the energy of desperation under the carpet of the passing years, it may seem to have to lost its grip and sway upon the present, but, almost inevitably, it returns.' This is evident in the epilogue of *Dead Souls*. Here Rebus looks out onto a demolition site in Edinburgh's Old Town where the Scottish Parliament, the offices of the *Scotsman* newspaper and a (never-to-arrive) theme park were due to be built:

> Demolition had stopped for the day […] They'd all be ready for the twenty-first century. Taking Scotland into the new millennium. Rebus tried to raise within himself a tiny cheer of hope, but

> found it stifled by his old cynicism. […] The blood that had seeped into stone, the bones that lay twisting in their eternity, the stories and horrors of the city's past and present … he knew they'd all come rising in the digger's steel jaws, bubbling to the surface as the city began its slow ascent towards being a nation's capital city. (Rankin, "Dead", 405)

Sure enough, the past emerges in the present as darkness symbolically falls in the opening chapter of the novel that follows (*Set in Darkness*). Here a body is found in a hidden fireplace in Queensbury House, a building undergoing redevelopment to become part of the new Scottish Parliament complex and (outside of the novel) one rumoured to have been the site where a servant was killed and eaten several centuries before. The setting and stories allow Rankin to suggest that time is cyclical and that, even as Edinburgh moves forward, the past will inevitably rise and painfully so.

The past's harmful re-emergence can even be seen in Rebus's health: '[a] lifetime of smoking was doing all its catching-up at once', Rankin tells us in *Rather Be The Devil,* '[a] cough that wouldn't shift; spitting out blood into the sink; prescription inhaler, prescription nebuliser; COPD[1]' (14-15). This brief example is one of many instances where the painful reappearance of the past is sudden. Rankin also points to the past's ability to painfully linger. In *Standing in Another Man's Grave*, for example, we meet Nina Hazlitt whose daughter, Sally, disappeared over two decades prior. Hazlitt is a determined character but she continues to be hurt by the events of the past, especially the uncertainty of what happened. One scene where she meets Rebus illustrates this:

> They focused on their drinks for a minute. Rebus didn't know what else to say to her. He didn't like to think of her as being trapped in limbo, but that's where she was. The past had its grip on her and

[1] COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) is a group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties (NHS, no date).

> wasn't letting go. He worked with the past, too, but he could always put it back in a box and have it delivered to a storeroom or warehouse. (Rankin, "Standing", 111)

Working with, or living in, the past means that Rebus is simultaneously spared of thinking about some aspects of the painful present but harmed by the suffocating past. Furthermore, as we have seen, letting go of the past is not always as easy for Rebus as Rankin suggests in the passage above; the haunting past is difficult to shake off.

The night

Like the past, the night is an important temporal dimension of many police procedurals. More than a backdrop, the night is 'alive', allowing authors like Rankin to play with the wider cultural associations of night and dark. Rankin does not equate the night with 'rest, relaxation and recuperation' (Shaw, 38). Rather he frames the night as being, on the one hand, secretive, dangerous, restless and imbued with a 'threatening strangeness' (Bronfen, 137) and, on the other hand, a site of transgression, concealed mobility and intrigue (Edensor). The nights in Rebus's Edinburgh are restless and dark. Yet the night is not an inversion of the day for Rankin. Furthermore, he does not see it as disconnected from the day; rather it informs, and is informed by, the day. Both the day and the night have lingering palimpsest imprints on each other.

Restless nights

Police procedural authors pay close attention to the off-duty lives of detectives. Central to the depiction of off-duty Rebus is his haunted restlessness, especially so at night and inside his flat. His restlessness is fuelled and symbolised by the ghosts that accompany him on nights spent alone in his tenement flat

in the Edinburgh district of Marchmont. This is especially so in *Set in Darkness* where ghosts are recurring reminders of the past and the need for justice:

> Rebus had ghosts in his life: they came hesitantly these days, not sure how welcome they'd be. Came to him as he sat in darkness, incidental music playing. Came to him on the long nights when he had no company, a gathering of souls and gestures, movement without voice. (Rankin, "Set", 422)

Ghosts are not Rebus's only nocturnal visitors; colleagues and members of Edinburgh's 'underworld' often turn up on Rebus's doorstep without invitation. 'I need to change addresses', Rebus bemoans in *Standing in Another Man's Grave*, '[s]eems every bugger in creation knows where I live' (329). At night and at home, Rankin writes of a detective that cannot disconnect from the city, his work and the past. Through a palimpsestic lens, the night and the home are where traces of the past linger and re-emerge:

> There were times when Rebus could swear he'd smelled his wife's perfume on the cold pillow. Impossible: two decades of separation; not even a pillow she'd slept on or pressed her head against. Other perfumes, too – other women. He knew they were an illusion, knew he wasn't really smelling them. Rather, he was smelling their absence. (Rankin, "Question", 57)

The Rebus series is full of tired characters – inside and outside of the police – who have trouble sleeping. Rebus's tiredness stems in large part from his inability to 'switch off' from work; his thoughts about the cases and victims continue – and often intensify – through the night. While he is usually alone at night, his thoughts and dreams centre on other people. 'Even with eyes closed, he couldn't shut out the world', Rankin tells us in *The Hanging Garden*, '[i]n fact, in those moments before sleep came, his images were at their most vivid' (249). Sleep offers little solace; in *Dead Souls*, Rankin writes that

Rebus had ‘lost any sense of vocation, any feeling of optimism about the role – the very existence – of policing’ and such ‘thoughts scared him, left him either sleepless or scarred by bad dreams’ (16). When sleep does come, it is troubling:

> Rebus hadn’t slept well in the bed; night sweats, the sheets like a straitjacket. Chase dreams waking him every hour or so, sending him shooting out of bed to stand naked and trembling in the middle of the floor. (Rankin, “Black and Blue”, 299)

In both *Let It Bleed* and *Black and Blue*, Rankin tells us that Rebus drinks a lot of alcohol because he believes it will stop him from dreaming. Sometimes Rebus sleeps in his car. More regularly he sleeps on a chair in the living room – a chair positioned next to the window, symbolising how the city outside is never far from his nocturnal thoughts and dreams.

Rebus’s restlessness at night often leads him to nocturnal walking and driving. With echoes of Walter Benjamin’s *flâneur* – a man who strolls voyeuristically through the city, simultaneously detached from and enthralled by his surroundings – Rebus often walks the streets and parks of Edinburgh at night, traversing the loud and quiet, busy and deserted, aggressive and tranquil parts of the city. His thoughts often wander back to the past of the places he navigates. His nocturnal mobility reflects his obsession with Edinburgh, its past and its darker side. Likewise, Rebus frequently drives at night:

> When he went home, he took the night home with him, and had to soak and scrub it away, feeling like an old paving slab, walked on daily. Sometimes it was easier to stay on the street, or sleep at the station. Sometimes he drove all night, not just through Edinburgh: down to Leith and past the working girls and hustlers, along the waterfront, South Queensferry sometimes, and then up on to the Forth Bridge, up the M90 through Fife, past Perth, all the way to Dundee,

> where he'd turn and head back, usually tired by then, pulling off the road if necessary and sleeping in his car. It all took time. (Rankin, "Black and Blue", 13-14)

Tiredness, perhaps unsurprisingly, is widespread among the characters; they are often described as looking and feeling tired, day and night. Rebus's tiredness, in *Tooth and Nail* for example, is described as 'seeping into his bones' and 'giving everything a hallucinatory quality' (31). Tiredness even seeps into the happier moments for Rebus and others, with smiles often described as 'tired smiles'.

Dark nights

Just as the night is prominent in the Rebus series, so too is darkness. The night here is accompanied by other dark settings, objects, moods and atmospheres within the novels. To borrow the words of hard-boiled novelist Raymond Chandler (quoted in Krutnik, 83), Rankin's novels are 'dark with something more than night.' When thinking about physical darkness, this is not restricted to the night. Here, then, subterranean and other barely lit settings are prominent in the Rebus series. Shadows too frequently appear – often at night but also during the day – and these are widely-used symbols in literature and the arts, hinting frequently at a lurking, hidden evil or threat (Sharpe). Also, during night and day we encounter characters that Rankin describes as possessing 'darkening' faces or dark eyes. For instance, Cafferty's eyes are described in *Standing in Another Man's Grave* as 'sudden dark tunnels, leading to darker places still' (87).

The night, nonetheless, is the site where darkness is most associated in the Rebus series. The nights are dark not only in the sense of lacking light but also in terms of their dark atmosphere, feeling gloomy, sullen, secretive and threatening. The darkness of night is reflected, for instance, in the opening chapters of many Rankin novels: set at night or as darkness is falling, where death occurs or bodies are discovered. It is also reflected in the volume of nocturnal crimes and offenders working at night:

[Fox:] “Night being where you do most of your business.”

[Cafferty:] “Guilty as charged.” (Rankin, “Song”, 76)

Rankin’s interest in nocturnal darkness appears to stem from his passion for Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which is largely set ‘in the gross darkness of the night’ (Stevenson, 10). Furthermore, Rankin also draws directly on Deacon Brodie – Brodie being a resident of 18th century Edinburgh who was (a) cabinet maker by day, (b) burglar and thief by night, and (c) often said to be the inspiration for the characters of Jekyll and Hyde. Indeed, in the aptly named *Set in Darkness*, Rankin namechecks Brodie when describing Edinburgh as ‘an invisible city, hiding its true feelings and intentions […] the city of Deacon Brodie, where bridled passions were given free play only at night’ (260). Brodie and Stevenson also come to mind in Rankin’s musing during *Even Dogs in the Wild* that ‘under cover of darkness, anything might happen undetected’ (229). In saying this, Rankin plays along with the idea that the invisibility provided by the dark night brings opportunities for illicit activities.

The danger of the night is heightened within Edinburgh’s licit and illicit night-time economy in the Rebus series. Here Rankin points to the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups such as women, sex workers and the impoverished in and around the night-time economy. A storyline in *Set in Darkness*, for instance, involves Clarke trying to apprehend a serial rapist and accomplice who attack women attending ‘singles’ nights’ in Edinburgh’s nightclubs. In *Hide and Seek*, meanwhile, sex workers are exploited within an illicit, nocturnal basement club called Hyde’s Club. Situated in a Georgian terrace that is accessible via a casino named Finlay’s, the basement club acts symbolically as the subterranean expression of Edward Hyde while the casino plays the ‘above-board’ role of Henry Jekyll. Hyde’s Club, Rebus is told, is a place where

> the city's increasingly jaded begetters of wealth could place some 'interesting bets'. A bit out of the ordinary, McCallum had said. Yes, like betting on two rent boys, junkies paid handsomely to knock the daylights out of one another and keep quiet about it afterwards. Paid with money and drugs. (Rankin, "Hide", 244)

In the dark nights of Rankin's novels, the restless police attempt to bring the activities of the past to light. We encounter detectives working long hours and irregular shifts, whose nights are often spent at crime scenes, the station as well as working (or at least thinking about work) at home, in the car and in the pub. Detectives in the series engage in nocturnal raids on properties (such as Hyde's Club), they liaise with bouncers and others working in the night-time economy and, returning to *Set in Darkness*, attend a single's night undercover. The police do not use nightly curfews – that banish groups from public space at specific times (Collins and Kearns) – in the Rebus series with the policing of the night being largely reactive rather than anticipatory. Rankin does not concentrate overly on the intricacies of policing the dark night or how it differs from policing during the day. However, he does establish the night as a threatening and dangerous time that requires policing.

Conclusion

Time is one of many mysteries that detective fiction grapples with and, as this article has shown, it is central to the Rebus series. When examining the novels through the lens of temporality – viewing time as a social construction – we can see that Rankin and his characters repeatedly imbue time with meaning. For instance, they associate waiting with frustration, the past with pain, and the night with deviance, darkness and restlessness. In addition, temporality brings into view Rankin's desire to challenge meanings associated with time, notably the association between older generations with obsolescence and irrelevance. Using the complimentary lens of relationality – examining the co-constitutive relationships between times and between times and place – shines a useful light on the

Rebus books. Here we can see, for instance, that Rankin portrays older generations in relation to their (often strained) relationship with younger generations, demonstrates that the past leaves a palimpsestic stain on the present, and suggests that on-duty time bleeds all-to-easily into off-duty time. Furthermore, a relational view shows how time and place are entangled within detective fiction. This is evident, for example, when certain places like graveyards and crime scenes evoke memories of the past for Rebus. The weaving together of time and place is also clear during restless nights when Rebus escapes the confines of his home, opting instead for solitary nocturnal walks or drives where his thoughts turn to the city, the past and the ghosts that haunt him.

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